The Importance of Courage

“We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face… we must do that which we think we cannot,” (Eleanor Roosevelt). This is comparable to the historical fiction novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* because characters must use strength, courage, and confidence to rise above the obstacles they face. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, a young girl and boy deal with racism in a Southern town while their father defends a black man claimed to have raped a white woman. Through the character and actions of Atticus Finch, the symbolism of a man standing alone against a mad dog, and the character Mrs. Dubose, the audience can understand what quality a person must have to face difficult situations. Harper Lee uses these challenges to convey the message that a person must have courage to stand up for what he or she believes.

In the book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* Atticus chose to take a court case to defend a black man and to enforce his own moral values, but also handle the criticism of family members and the people of the fictional town Maycomb, Alabama. “Grandma says it’s bad enough he lets you all run wild, but now he’s turned out a nigger-lover we’ll never be able to walk the streets of Maycomb again. He’s ruinin’ the family, that’s what he’s doin’,” (110) Francis complains to Scout. Atticus ignores the family’s comments due to the courage he holds to take the insults and do what he believes is right even when the people he loves will not support him. Another example of Atticus’s courageousness is clear when Atticus teaches his children to ignore what people in the town say about him and not let it affect their confidence. “You just hold your head high and keep those fists down. No matter what anyone says to you don’t let ‘em get your goat,” (76) Atticus tells his children. As a result of Atticus’s actions and words the audience learns why Atticus is willing to accomplish the difficult and remain confident even when the community seems to be against him.

Harper Lee uses the symbolism of a mad dog to showAtticus is the only person in the town with courage to stand up for a cause. “You know what’s going to happen as well as I do, Jack, and I hope and pray I can get Jem and Scout through it without bitterness, and most of all, without catching Maycomb’s usual disease,” (117) Atticus tells Uncle Jack. In other words, Atticus is telling Uncle Jack that he does not want his children to turn to racism like everyone else in Maycomb. Atticus also wants his children to not let the bitterness of people lower their confidence and change their values. After Atticus informs Uncle Jack of Maycomb’s disease a stray dog which also has a disease wanders in to the town. “With movements so swift they seemed simultaneous, Atticus’s hand yanked a ball-tipped lever as he brought the gun to his shoulder. The rifle cracked.” (127) Atticus had to be the one to take down the diseased dog just as he is the one willing to stand up the town’s disease of racism.

Harper Lee also uses the character Mrs. Dubose to show the determination she had to overcome a challenge. “She said she was going to leave this world beholden to nothing and nobody…she said she meant to break herself of it before she died, and that’s what she did,” (148) Atticus tells Jem. To clarify what Atticus said Mrs. Dubose was addicted to morphine and made a goal to be free of it before she died. It was a challenge, but each time her alarm clock went off she went longer without the drug. “I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It’s when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what,” (149) Atticus explains to Jem. Atticus wanted Jem to understand the power of courage comes in many forms. Mrs. Dubose believed in dying “as free as the mountain air,” and her willpower allowed her to accomplish her goal (148).

An important lesson from the story, To Kill a Mockingbird, is having the fortitude to stay true to a commitment even with the criticism of others. Harper Lee harnesses the power of Atticus Finch’s words and actions, the symbolism of standing alone against a disease in many forms, and the perseverance of Mrs. Dubose to illustrate the importance of courage. Life would be meaningless without being ambitious and challenging oneself to accomplish the difficult. Sometimes a person’s aspirations can be difficult to achieve because of the disapproval of society and people pushing off their own beliefs. However, if this person has the strength to defy society’s influence then they can accomplish anything.